

# SEXTING



**What Every Adult Needs to Know**

## **Message from Attorney General Beau Biden**

You may not have heard of it, but your teen or pre-teen may be doing it—"sexting." Across the country, young people have embraced cell phone and computer technology. While advancements in technology increase educational opportunities and convenience, young people are also using it in potentially harmful ways. When young people take explicit photographs of themselves or others and then share these images, they are at risk for both legal and non-legal consequences discussed in this brochure.

"Sexting" - a term that combines "sex" and "texting" - occurs when a minor sends a sexually explicit or provocative text message or photo of themselves or another minor through their cell phone or computer. Young people engage in this behavior for a variety of reasons: flirting, harassment, bullying, or even as an attempt to be funny or raise social status among peers.

When a young person sends a "sext", they lose control over the image forever: These messages can be forwarded around school, across town, or posted online. These images can be viewed by unintended recipients and remain online forever. In the blink of an eye, your child may face embarrassment, harassment, or worse. And when the explicit image is of a person under the age of 18, "sexting" is considered a crime.

Our children grow up fast and we cannot watch them 24-7. But, we can talk to them about thinking before they act, especially when it comes to sexting. This publication explores what motivates our young people to "sext" and how adults can address this behavior. We have a responsibility to educate and empower our youth to act responsibly and to be aware of the consequences associated with sexting.

Teach your children about the dangers of "sexting." Remember- Send is 4ever.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Joseph R. Biden, III". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a prominent "J" and "B".

# What is Sexting?



“Sexting” is sending or forwarding nude, sexually suggestive, or explicit pictures or messages via cell phone or online. Once a “sext” is sent, it can spread rapidly and become available for anyone and everyone to view.

A “sext” may initially be sent to your child’s boyfriend or girlfriend who forwards it to his/her circle of friends, who in turn forwards it to other students at school, and beyond. . . .

Once your child presses “send,” he or she loses control over that image forever; it is available for anyone to see and collect.

**Send is 4ever!**

# Why does sexting occur?

Many teens say that exchanging graphic images makes dating and “hooking up” more likely. Nearly one third said they believe that people who exchange such images are expected to date or hook-up (A Thin Line, 2009).

Teens report that cell phones and texting are a huge part of their lives. They are almost addicted to being connected to their peers.

Teens give the following as reasons for “sexting”:

- Responding to pressure from someone who wants to date them;
- Responding to pressure from friends to send or post sexual content;
- Having fun or as a joke;
- Responding to sexual content and messages received

## The Consequences

### **Legal**

Your teen can be charged with producing or distributing child pornography. If these photos are kept on the cell phone or computer, your teen can be charged with possession of child pornography. Forwarding these images to others can result in a charge of distribution of child pornography. Sending the image across state line may be considered a federal crime. Civil lawsuits may also be filed, resulting potentially in money damages.

### **Non-Legal**

There are significant social and emotional consequences of sexting. Relationships among teens may quickly come and go. A former friend

who received a graphic image of your child may forward that image to others or post it online. Once distributed or posted online, these images may remain in circulation forever.

### **The Bottom Line**

As a parent, your notion of what is private and what is public differs substantially from that of your teen. Adults must recognize that teens have a need to be connected, and their online and off-line lives are one and the same. In most cases, the phone is the property of the parent. Set clear rules for your child’s possession and use of their phone.

# Educate Yourself

## Use Available Resources.

Prevention begins with awareness. Know how your teen's mobile phone operates. Regularly review the phone bill, paying attention to usage, including time of day your teen is texting. Is your teen texting or sending pictures at 2 AM? You and your teen should regularly review stored images and text exchanges.

### Watch out for these warning signs:

1. Teens texting by themselves or alone in the dark;
2. Texting for long periods of time;
3. Changes in behavior – discomfort, stress, isolation or behaviors out of the norm.

## Keep lines of communication open. Try starting a conversation by asking:

"Have you ever received an explicit picture or message on your cell phone?"

"Do you think it is okay to send explicit pictures or messages of you or your friends ?

"Have you been pressured to send pictures or messages that are sexual in nature?"

"What do you think might happen if you or your friends send an explicit message or picture on your phone?"

Asking these questions can help uncover your teen's feelings about these behaviors and can address your child's knowledge about consequences before creating, sending, or forwarding these images.

Surveys show that one in five young people post and send sexually revealing photos, sometimes with those they haven't met.

(A Thin Line, 2009)

# Educate Your Teen

**Educating Your Teen** may alter their behavior by removing the mystery of sexting. Talking about sexting helps your teen understand that you are aware of the pressures they face everyday.

When you talk to your teen, try to do it in a relaxed setting. Keep the lines of communication open and bring up the following CONSEQUENCES:

- **SEXTING CAN GET YOU IN TROUBLE WITH THE LAW.** Teens can be prosecuted, even forced to register as sex offenders if they send or forward sexual images.
- Since anyone can view these images - parents, teachers, friends at school, and anyone else- sexting may negatively impact your life. It may adversely affect employment opportunities, admission to college, and public reputation.
- This behavior is cruel. Forwarding these images creates negative social consequences: embarrassment, fear, stress and humiliation.

## Help break the cycle

- Teach your child to report sexting messages to a trusted adult.
- Think before you send! Teach your child to think before they send or forward messages.
- Impose clear rules for the use of the phone and computer and clear consequences for violating rules.

**Send is 4ever!**

# What to do if you find explicit images?

Ensure that the spread of the image is stopped. Confiscate the phone and suspend the teen's ability to use the phone and the account. Report the incident to the CyberTipline or state or local law enforcement. Police will take steps to control the spread of the image and protect the person in the picture.

## **Tell Your Teen:**

### **1. Sexting is illegal!**

If teens are caught with nude photos of children under the age of 18, they may be charged with possession of child pornography and may end up on the sex offender registry.

### **2. A one-time joke can cause a lifetime of humiliation!**

Images sent over cell phone can also end up on computers and the Internet. These photos are easily sent through other e-mails and social marketing sites.

### **3. Sexting is Degrading and Cruel!**

Teens who have had their images shared may experience depression and anxiety. Increased suicide rates have been reported. Offenders have been suspended from school and lost jobs.

## **REPORT IT.**

Go online to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) @ [www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org) and make a report to the CyberTipline or call the Hotline at 1-800-843-5678 (1-800-THE-LOST)

## **OR**

Call State or local law enforcement

## Resources for Families

- Delaware Attorney General's Office

Website: [www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov](http://www.attorneygeneral.delaware.gov)

Wilmington Office (302) 577-8500

Dover Office (302) 739-4211

Georgetown Office (302) 856-5353

- Local and State Police
- National Center for Missing and Exploited Children  
[www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org) or 1 (800) 843-5678
- Delaware Child Predator Task Force  
(302) 739-2030
- The Delaware Department of Services for Children,  
Youth, and Their Families

[www.kids.delaware.gov](http://www.kids.delaware.gov) (302) 633-2600

### Websites

[www.safekids.org](http://www.safekids.org)

[www.safeteens.com](http://www.safeteens.com)

[www.netsmartz.org](http://www.netsmartz.org)

[www.ikeepsafe.org](http://www.ikeepsafe.org)

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